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ABSTRACT

This Digest provides an overview of children's online magazines, also known as e-zines. It begins with a brief review of factors that contribute to the popularity of these publications, followed by a list of criteria for selecting high-quality online magazines for children. Samples of high-quality children's e-zines are also included in this Digest. Contains 8 references and annotated links to 7 high-quality e-zines. (RS)

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by Mei-Yu Lu

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Evaluating and Selecting Online Magazines for Children

By Mei-Yu Lu

The introduction and growing use of the World Wide Web since the early 1990s has enabled readers to gain immediate access to great quantities of information. This, in turn, has prompted many businesses to exploit the internet as a medium through which to promote their products and services (Brody, 1997; Clyde, 1998). Publishing for children, especially online magazines (i.e., e-zines), is no exception (Johnson, 2002). The purpose of this Digest is to provide an overview of children's e-zines. It begins with a brief review of factors that contribute to the popularity of these publications, followed by a list of criteria for selecting high-quality online magazines for children. Samples of high-quality children's e-zines are also included in this Digest.

Factors Contributing to the Popularity of Children's E-zines

Compared to printed magazines, e-zines can be vastly superior in terms of each of the following factors:

Cost: Both publishers and readers benefit monetarily from electronic publishing (Boone & Higgins, 1998; Freeman, 1996). For a publisher, an e-zine reduces the production cost. Also, readers do not pay shipping.

Accessibility: Online magazines provide readers immediate and wide access to information (Boone & Higgins, 1998; Freeman, 1996). Readers with internet access can directly download or read information online without geographical restrictions.

Timeliness: The online nature of e-zines helps ease the publishing process. Editors and authors are able to change, add, or delete materials readily (Boone & Higgins, 1998; Brody, 1997) in order to ensure the authenticity, accuracy, and currency of the information.

Content: Unlike printed magazines, which often present information in a linear fashion, e-zines offer hyperlinks which allow readers to "wander around" paths related to the main idea and go beyond the materials covered in a particular article. Thus, e-zines broaden and enrich the scope of topics addressed (Boone & Higgins, 1998; Brody, 1997; Johnson, 2002).

Interactivity and Reader Participation: A key feature of e-zines is the opportunity they provide for interactivity between readers, between authors and readers, and between readers and the text (Brody, 1997; Freeman, 1996; Johnson, 2002). Many popular children's e-zines now invite readers to be part of the production process, both by filling out surveys and by submitting their own work for publication in the e-zine. In addition, children's online magazines are able to develop and organize various activities that permit their readers to create artwork, play games, "ask an expert," and meet other readers online.

Modes of Media Presented: E-zines make use of the internet's multimedia capacity (Boone & Higgins, 1998; Brody, 1997; Freeman, 1996). In addition to the written texts, tables, charts, and images traditionally used in printed magazines, e-zines expand offerings to audio, animation, video clips, and other modes of presentation. The author is able to select the most appropriate media to represent his/her idea or to use multiple media to help deepen readers' understanding and enjoyment of a particular topic.

Criteria for Evaluating Children's E-zines

While there are many e-zines available for children, their quality, content, and usefulness vary. The following criteria were developed based on recommendations from various sources (Abdullah, 1998; Agosto, D., 2003; ALSC Children and Technology Committee, 1997) in order to help educators and parents evaluate and select appropriate e-zines for children.

Content

- Information provided needs to be accurate, current, and relevant to the purpose of the magazine.
- Information should be age and developmentally appropriate.
- Information should encourage, inspire, and stimulate children's learning and imagination.
- Materials that promote particular biases should be rejected or reviewed critically.

Functionality and Stability

- The purpose of the magazine should be clearly stated.
- Advertising should be reduced to a minimum and be relevant to the purpose of the magazine.
- Navigational functions should be clearly explained and easy to use.
- The site should load in a reasonable period of time, usually within 10-20 seconds.
- Language used for instruction in the site should be appropriate for the intended readers.
- When possible, magazines should include features for special populations, such as visually or hearing impaired readers.
- The magazine should only include relevant, current, accurate, and high-quality links.

Authorship/Sponsorship

- The authors/sponsoring organizations should be properly identified.
- The editor's contact information should be available so readers can send comments or ask questions.
- Sites that violate copyright statutes should not be included.

Design

- The overall design should be attractive and conducive to the reading of the text.
- Graphics and images should be easy to read.
- Audio and video components should be high quality and clear.
- The font size, appearance, and color of text should be easy to read and view.
- Games and activities should be accompanied by clear, well-written instructions.
- A site should never request any personal information.

A Platter of Quality E-zines for Children

The following is a sample of high-quality e-zines selected on the basis of the criteria above.

Title: EEK: Environmental Education for Kids
http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eek/index.htm
By Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources; Monthly; for ages 9-14, parents, and educators.
Focus: environmental, nature, and outdoor education.
Features: resources for educators; career information related to environmental sciences; activities, stories, riddles, and informational articles.

Title: MidLink Magazine
http://www.cs.ucf.edu/~MidLink/
By SAS inSchool, North Carolina State University and the University of Central Florida; Quarterly; for ages 8-18.
Focus: all subjects, as well as current issues.
Features: cooperative classroom projects that link learners from around the world; resources for educators; Web sites of schools around the globe.

Title: Parents and Children Together Online
http://eric.indiana.edu/pcto.html
By ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication; Quarterly; for ages 5-14 and parents.
Focus: reading, literacy, and information articles focus on sciences and social sciences.
Features: fiction, poetry, and information articles for children; resources for parents and educators.

Title: Stone Soup Magazine
http://www.stonesoup.com/index.html
By Stone Soup Publisher; Bimonthly; for ages 8-13.
Focus: literature and art.
Features: accepts children's art and writing work; pen pal program; teacher resources; archived sample stories, poems, artwork from past issues.
Frequency: 6 times per year.

Title: Scholastic News
http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/
By Scholastic, Inc.; Weekly (top stories change daily); for ages 8-14, parents, and educators.
Focus: current news and events, arts and entertainment.
Features: news stories, polls, games, quizzes, and news radio for children; resources for educators and parents.

Title: Wanna Bet
http://www.wannabet.org/
By North American Training Institute; 2-4 issues per year; for ages 8-14.
Focus: youth gambling prevention and education.
Features: accepts reader submissions; research based materials; ask the expert column

Title: WireTap
http://www.wiretapmag.org/
By AlterNet.org and the Independent Media Institute; funded by The Open Society Institute, Surdna Foundation, and the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Foundation; Weekly; for ages 14 and up, educators, and parents.
Focus: social issues and social activism.
Features: independent information source by and for socially conscious youth; accepts reader submissions; online forum; book reviews, movies, and albums.

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